



IS STONE(WORK) GREEN?

by Marc Archimbault

CURIOSITY

The biennial *Green Building Guide* was due out shortly—the western North Carolina bible of sustainable design, products and construction.

“You’re green,” I was told by a young man, a member of the Green Building Council. “You should totally advertise.”

Everyone, but everyone, was in the guide.

“Stone’s not green,” I countered.

“It totally is,” he said. “It’s all natural and it’s local.”

“It’s even renewable,” I replied.

“Totally,” he said. Sarcasm is lost on the earnest.

I didn’t buy it—the concept or the advertising.

To me green building was high-tech: cutting edge composites and recycled content. Green was ethereal: sunlight and wind. Green was gentle: softly harvested lumber and citrus cleansers. Green is new and now.

I work stone. My material is ancient, earthy and often must be wrested from the ground by explosives and flaming diesel. Stonework is old and, by many accounts, over. Stone does renew, but in geologic time. Visit an abandoned quarry and you’ll find rusting cars and spray paint, but no granite seedlings peeking up through the dust.

Metamorphic stone is locally available here in my mountains, but lovely, easy-to-work sandstone is trucked in on flatbeds from neighboring states. Stone lasts a long time when used properly. But sandstone travels all that way just to be stood up on edge in thin veneers, an invitation to water and exfoliation.

This would have been the end of my consideration of stonework as ‘green’ except that the conversation had brought to the surface something that had long troubled me: that my life’s work was a scar upon

the earth, that I was a lumbering, destructive beast, ruining my children’s home in order to give them a house.

Could stonework be green? Putting my cynicism aside, I started exploring.

DISCOVERY

A few months later I found myself preparing to do a presentation at a local ‘green conference.’ The conference focused on the construction trades and I was to address how stonework could be more green.

I researched the subject. Statistics abounded. Carbon footprints ran everywhere. Oftentimes the stats were muddy, comparing apples to coal production. Everyone seemed to agree that the fate of mankind was at stake and that someone needed to start making some hard choices. But how was this flood of minutia going to change anyone’s behavior?

For my presentation, I began with sim-